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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000158

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TAGS: [PGOVL](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: SISTANI URGES IRAQIS TO VOTE

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2832  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2661

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Timothy A. Lenderking for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) In a statement released by his Najaf office on Monday, January 19, Grand Ayatollah Ali Husayni al-Sistani urged Iraqis to vote in the upcoming provincial elections. Acknowledging the disappointment that some Iraqis have with their democratically elected officials and the electoral process, Sistani nonetheless called on "all residents, men and women, to participate in the coming elections," and stressed "not to boycott it despite not being totally satisfied with the previous electoral experience." Sistani reaffirmed his neutrality in the upcoming elections, stating: "the religious leadership stands an equal distance from all candidates in these elections, but it stresses at the same time that voters must, after thorough checks and evaluation, choose those who are worthy of becoming members of provincial councils."

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Sistani's statement is consistent with other messages issued by the Shi'a higher religious authority in the past year in support of the electoral process. Sistani's statement will encourage voter turnout, providing an impetus to those who have grown disenchanted with Iraq's democratic process to participate in the provincial elections. Perhaps more significant is his declared position of neutrality, a firm rebuke to those parties and individuals competing in the elections who seek to capitalize on his exalted status among the Shi'a faithful by claiming his support. End Comment.  
CROCKER